

## CLAIMS

I claim:

1. A step for boarding a vessel from the water, said step comprising:

5 a support;

a strap with an upper end and a lower end, the lower end attached to the support; and

a keeper comprising a substantially planar foldable piece of material having an upper area

and a lower area, said keeper further comprising:

a slot in the upper area, the upper end of the strap extending therethrough for

10 attachment to said vessel; and

releasable fasteners attached to at least a portion of the perimeter of said upper

and lower areas, the fasteners on the upper area adapted to interlock with

those on the lower area;

such that the keeper may be folded to interlock the lower fasteners to the upper fasteners,

15 whereby the interlocked fasteners and the fold thus formed at the bottom of the keeper

make an enclosure in which the strap may be gathered with said support hanging from the

upper junction of said upper and lower areas, whereby said support when pulled will

cause said strap to extend from said enclosure.

2. The step of claim 1, wherein said support floats.

20 3. The step of claim 1, further comprising a clasp, for attachment to a vessel, the

upper end of said strap being attached to said clasp.

4. The step of claim 1, further comprising a loop attached to the back of said upper area above said slot and a clasp, the upper end of the strap and the clasp being attached to said loop.

5. The step of claim 4, further comprising a releasable buckle near the upper end of the strap.

6. The step of claim 1, wherein said strap further comprises a releasable buckle.

7. The step of claim 6, wherein said quick release buckle is located near the lower end of said strap to facilitate replacement of said handle.

8. The step of claim 6, wherein said strap further comprises an adjustment clip to allow the length of said strap to be changed.

9. The step of claim 6, wherein said quick release buckle is located near the upper end of said strap and below said slot such that said buckle is visible when said keeper is in an open configuration and said strap is extended.

10. The step of claim 1, wherein the keeper further comprises printed instructions.

15 11. The step of claim 1, wherein said releasable fasteners are hook-and-loop fasteners.

12. The step of claim 1, wherein the upper area of said keeper further comprises a top section, said top section being adapted to fold downward, the top section having releasable fasteners on its back side which when so folded are brought into position for 20 interlocking with the fasteners of the lower area.

13. The step of claim 12, further comprising a loop attached to the back of said upper area above said slot and a clasp, the upper end of the strap and said clasp being attached to said loop.

14. The step of claim 13, further comprising a releasable buckle near the upper end of the strap.

15. The step of claim 12, wherein the keeper further comprises printed instructions.

16. The step of claim 12, wherein said releasable fasteners are hook-and-loop  
5 fasteners.

17. The step of claim 12, wherein said support floats.

18. The step of claim 12, wherein said strap comprises releasable buckles and an adjustment clip.

19. The step of claim 1, wherein said keeper is made from a single piece of material.

10 20. A step for boarding a vessel from the water, said step comprising:

a support;

a strap with an upper end and a lower end, the lower end attached to the support; and

a keeper made of a substantially planar foldable piece of material, having an upper area

and a lower area with releasable fasteners attached to at least a portion of the

15 perimeter of said upper and lower areas, the fasteners on the upper area adapted to interlock with those on the lower area, the upper end of said strap attached to said keeper;

such that the keeper may be folded to interlock the lower fasteners to the upper fasteners,

whereby the interlocked fasteners and the fold thus formed at the bottom of the keeper

20 make an enclosure in which the strap may be gathered with said support hanging from the upper junction of said upper and lower areas, whereby said support when pulled will cause said strap to extend from said enclosure.

21. The step of claim 20, wherein said strap is attached to the lower area of said keeper.
22. The step of claim 20, further comprising a loop attached to the back of said upper area and a clasp, said clasp being attached to said loop.
- 5 23. The step of claim 20, wherein the keeper further comprises printed instructions.
24. The step of claim 20, wherein said releasable fasteners are hook-and-loop fasteners.
25. The step of claim 20, wherein said support floats.
26. The step of claim 20, wherein said strap comprises a releasable buckle and an 10 adjustment clip.
27. A stowable step for boarding a vessel from the water, said step comprising:  
a support;  
a strap with an upper end and a lower end, the lower end attached to the support; and  
a keeper made of a substantially planar foldable piece of material, having an upper area  
15 and a lower area with releasable fasteners attached to at least a portion of the perimeter of said upper and lower areas, the fasteners on the upper area adapted to interlock with those on the lower area;  
means for attaching the upper end of said strap and said keeper to said vessel;  
such that the keeper may be folded to interlock the lower fasteners to the upper fasteners,  
20 whereby the interlocked fasteners and the fold thus formed at the bottom of the keeper make an enclosure in which the strap may be gathered with said support hanging from the upper junction of said upper and lower areas, whereby said support when pulled will cause said strap to extend from said enclosure.